

Abstract 567

TITLE: Uncharted Waters: Planning for an HIV Seroprevalance Study Among Individuals of Transgender Experience in New York (NY)

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ISSUE: Extremely limited NY-specific HIV/AIDS data exist that address HIV and behavioral risk factors, gender identify and health care access of the transgender (TG) population. Through the use of focus groups, a survey instrument, and oral fluid testing, information which can be used for effective HIV prevention planning and interventions will be obtained. This collaborative project is among the first in NY to focus on the TG population.

SETTING: Gathering places, agencies and sex venues in New York City where participants self-identify as transgender, transsexual, or two-spirited.

PROJECT: Study design was accomplished collaboratively, followed by Institutional Review Board submission and approval. Serial focus groups, a short-answer written survey, and time line biography will be used to describe the nature and frequency of HIV-related behavior and risk determinants among this sub-population. Topics to be explored will include: personal demographics and descriptors; identity issues (change over time/evolution); transition (length of time at current status), HIV, STD and hepatitis risk information; access to (transgender-specific care/insurance); social services; criminal justice system involvement; and employment issues.

RESULTS: The process of collaboration will be elaborated. Numbers of persons recruited to date, seroprevalence among participants, behaviors most highly associated with risk and/or HIV+ status and evaluation of various study methodologies will follow.

LESSONS LEARNED: Community input and participation are crucial to developing, fine-tuning and deploying a culturally sensitive instrument. Time line biographies, together with voluntary, anonymous HIV testing and a short risk assessment survey can capture comprehensive information in a short period of time. Linkages with CBOs and key individuals in the community ensure participation and increase the community's trust in government agency sponsored research. Outcomes can be used to meet prevention needs of this vital community.

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